

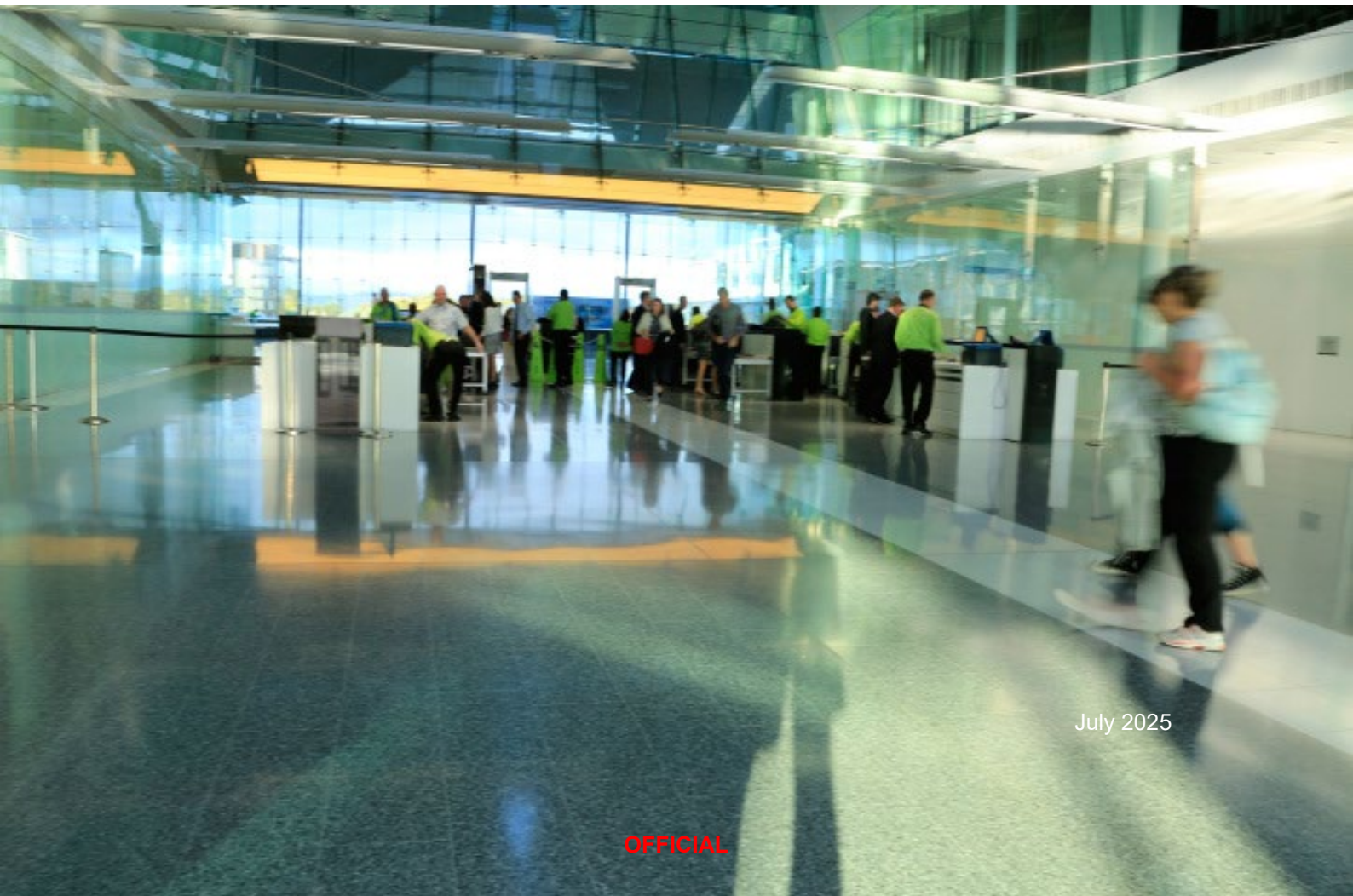
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Australian Government
Civil Aviation Safety Authority

CABIN SAFETY BULLETIN **ISSUE NO. 2**

Disorderly passengers



July 2025

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our offices are located and the places to which we travel for work.

We also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians' continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

Artwork: James Baban

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A cabin safety bulletin is an advisory document that alerts, educates and makes recommendations about cabin safety matters. Recommendations in this bulletin are not mandatory.

Revision history

Amendments/revisions of this protocol are recorded below in order of most recent first.

Table 1. Revision history table

Version No.	Date	Parts/Sections	Details
1.1	July 2025	N/A	Content moved to new template.
1.0	Dec 2022	All	First release

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1. Purpose

This bulletin provides operator guidance in relation to disorderly passengers, extracts of which have been taken from International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Doc 10117 Manual on the Legal Aspects of Unruly and Disruptive Passengers First Edition 2019, ICAO Doc 10002 Cabin Safety Training Manual Second Edition 2020 and Transport Canada Advisory Circular 700-010 Unruly passengers and incidents of interference with a crew member.

This bulletin describes an example of an acceptable means, but not the only means, of demonstrating compliance with regulations and standards. On its own this bulletin does not change, create, amend or permit deviations from regulatory requirements, nor does it establish minimum standards.

A cabin safety bulletin is an advisory document that alerts, educates and makes recommendations about cabin safety matters.

Recommendations in this bulletin are not mandatory.

2. Who does this bulletin apply to?

This bulletin applies to all operators of Australian registered aircraft and should be read in conjunction with section 24 of the Civil Aviation Act 1988 and Part 91 of the Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998, specifically, CASR 91.525 Offensive or disorderly behaviour and CASR 91.580 Passengers – compliance with safety instructions by cabin crew.

3. Terminology

Acronyms and abbreviations

Table 2. List of acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym/abbreviation	Description
ATSR	Aviation Transport Security Regulations 2005
CASA	Civil Aviation Safety Authority
CASR	Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organisation

Definitions

Table 3. List of definitions

Term	Definition
cabin crew	Cabin crew – when required (Part 91.820 of CASR) An aircraft carrying 20 or more passengers must carry a cabin crew member. However, if the flight crew includes 2 pilots, then an aircraft may carry up to 22 passengers without a cabin crew member, provided that no more than 19 of the passengers are adults or children. Exception: Parachuting activity flights (to which Part 105 applies) do not have to carry a cabin crew member (CASR Part 91 Plain English Guide V2.0)

Term	Definition
disorderly passenger	<p>Offensive or disorderly behaviour on aircraft (Part 91.525 of CASR)</p> <p>A person must not behave in an offensive or disorderly manner which as a result may endanger the safety of the aircraft or persons onboard.</p> <p>The operator or a crew member may refuse to allow a person to board an aircraft if they reasonably believe the person is likely to behave in an offensive or disorderly manner which could endanger the safety of the aircraft or persons onboard.</p> <p>A person is taken to behave in an offensive or disorderly manner if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assault, intimidate or threaten another person (this may be verbal or physical, and whether or not a weapon or object is used), or • intentionally damage or destroy property. interference with a crew member means any action or statement by a person in breach of section 24 of the Civil Aviation Act 1988 by a person on board or about to board an aircraft that interferes with a crew member in the performance of their assigned safety responsibilities or threatens the safety of an aircraft or of persons on board an aircraft. <p>(CASR Part 91 Plain English Guide V2.0)</p>

4. Background

Unruly or disruptive conduct on board aircraft may pose a threat to the safety and security of aircraft and its crew and passengers. It may also cause costly disruption to air travel when aircraft are diverted due to poor behaviour.

The terms unruly passengers, disruptive passengers and unruly and disruptive passengers are commonly understood as referring to passengers who fail to respect the rules of conduct on board aircraft or to follow the instructions of crew members and thereby create a threat to flight safety and/or disturb the good order and discipline on board aircraft. The incidence of unruly and disruptive passenger events has marked a more robust response from operators in recent years, such as diverting the aircraft.

5. Reported incidents

Statistics provided by ICAO outline the types of incidents and offences such as:

- assault on crew members or passengers
- fights among intoxicated passengers
- child molestation
- sexual harassment and assault
- disorderly conduct as a result of alcohol intoxication
- illegal consumption of drugs on board
- refusal to follow a crew member's lawful instruction
- ransacking and sometimes vandalizing of aircraft seats and cabin interior
- unauthorised use of portable electronic devices
- destruction of safety equipment on board
- other disorderly or riotous conduct.

6. Consequences of disruptive passenger behaviour

Punishment for disruptive behaviour will vary depending on the severity. Unruly or disruptive passengers can be held civilly or criminally accountable for their actions through a variety of means. The means by which compensation is sought and the severity of the penalty depend on the actions of the passenger, and the extent to which their actions threatened safety and security. Unruly or disruptive passengers may be met by airline personnel and police and a verbal or written warning issued.

Operators or state or federal police may refer to CASA incidents that have breached civil aviation legislation, which could lead to the issue of an aviation infringement notice. An unruly or disruptive passenger may be issued multiple infringement notices relating to the same incident if a number of breaches of the civil aviation legislation occurred. Police may also arrest or charge the passenger with one or more offences rather than refer the matter to CASA. The offences committed are criminal in nature and could result in the recording of a criminal conviction against the individual concerned.

An operator that makes a decision to divert an aircraft due to unruly or disruptive passenger behaviour may seek reimbursement for items such as fuel loss, airport related costs, payments to other passengers for inconvenience or related costs such as additional meals, accommodation or alternative flights.

7. Deny boarding

The operator has the authority to refuse to board any passenger displaying behaviour that may present a risk to the safety of the aircraft, persons on board the aircraft or their property.

In developing procedures on the refusal to transport passengers, operators will need to consider all aspects of managing an incident, including the prevention, recognition and reporting of an unruly or disruptive behaviour which may occur at any time during check-in, in the departure area, while on the ramp, as well as on board the aircraft.

Even though incidents where passengers exhibit unruly or disruptive behaviour often begin once on board the aircraft or following take-off, early signs of a possible problem may arise before boarding and should, whenever possible, be identified at that time. For example, aggressive, loud, obnoxious behaviour during check-in or in the departure area, may lead to more significant problems on board the aircraft. Generally, behaviour that prevents ground personnel or crew members from performing or completing their tasks, are good indicators that a situation may deteriorate and adversely affect the safety of the flight.

Operators should consider all aspects of a situation in order to accurately evaluate the different conditions under which a passenger may be denied boarding. These considerations should include, among other things, the passenger's attitude, possible triggers of unruly behaviour, and attempts to solve the problem. Denying passenger carriage in one instance does not translate to the permanent banning of travel by air of a person, however, a way to offer crew members a safe workplace and other passengers' safe transportation to their destination. When establishing conditions for the refusal of passengers, the operator should be clear as to when and under what conditions passengers will be permitted on board the aircraft after an incident has occurred. When a decision to deny boarding is made, all operational personnel who were or will be in contact with the passenger denied uplift, need to be made aware of this decision and the reason why.

It is essential that operator policies ensure all staff respect a decision to deny boarding to a passenger, and that a reversal of such a decision could adversely compromise the safety of the flight and the occupants of the aircraft. This also applies when a crew member reaches the determination that a passenger should be removed for actions displayed on an aircraft. Ground personnel should never reverse decisions such as passenger carriage. Individuals exhibiting unruly and disruptive behaviour are a much greater threat in the air than on the ground.

When faced with a passenger exhibiting unruly behaviour, it is important that staff members are able to communicate to that passenger the necessary information related to the consequences of his or her actions and the options that are available under such circumstances (for example, the potential for the passenger to travel on an alternate flight). Passengers who are made aware of why they are being denied boarding will better understand the consequences of their actions, as opposed to passengers who are refused access on board an aircraft without explanation. Without such information, the passenger may become more agitated and uncooperative.

Operational personnel who interface with passengers should also consider the individual's viewpoint. For example, a staff member reaction to a passenger's demands may come across as discourteous due to pressure relating to on-time departure, the stress from dealing with long queues and irritated passengers. These are examples of circumstances that may contribute to a situation escalating out of control. Therefore, training should include effective communication, conflict resolution, problem-solving and methods for managing work-related stress.

8. Interference with a crew member

The objective of legislation relating to interference with a crew member is the reduction of incidents involving unruly or disruptive passengers and to educate the wider aviation community that situations of interference with crew members are not tolerated on board an aircraft or at any other time during travel. To achieve this objective, operators must review procedures to ensure their effectiveness and that they are reflective of operator operations.

Prevention is an important aspect of any program — clear procedures should be established on ways to avoid situations where passengers may become unruly or disruptive. For example, alcohol service should be carried out reasonably and responsibly given that it can have greater effect on people at altitude. All staff should also be attentive to passengers consuming alcohol in terminal buildings and report any concern to the appropriate personnel as soon as it is identified. Operators should ensure that all persons responsible for the service of alcoholic beverages, successfully complete a training program before being authorised to carry out alcohol service. Since the effects of alcohol are often reported as being one of the leading factors relating to incidents of interference with crew members, it is critical operators provide a similar type of training to reinforce operational personnel awareness on the effects of alcohol.

Company procedures should include the various types of incidents to which operational personnel can be exposed together with possible outcomes. These procedures need to provide staff members with an understanding into various situations to which they may be subjected and the application of consistent management strategies. Clear procedures on the different steps to follow and possible repercussions may contribute to neutralising a situation and preventing some form of escalation where a passenger is considered unruly and interfering with a crew member.

Operator procedures should emphasise the rapid detection of unruly or disruptive behaviour. If identified prior to embarkation, the passenger should be denied boarding, which will reduce the risk of incidents occurring on board the aircraft. Unruly or disruptive behaviour is not always obvious; however, early signs are often present before a situation escalates. Signs, such as inebriation, aggressive or verbally abusive behaviour are all significant indications of potential problems.

Operator procedures should be contained within operations manuals and disseminated to all appropriate operational personnel together with requisite training.

9. COVID-19 Pandemic causation of unruly and disruptive passengers

The universal state concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, including operator applied containment measures, the potential risk of being exposed to infected individual(s) and the need to cope with unfamiliar situations in the workplace, are likely to have a negative impact on the mental well-being of some staff members and passengers. In the context of these containment measures, an increase in cases of unruly or disruptive passengers should be anticipated, either prior to departure or in-flight. This may be exhibited by a passenger who does not wish to sit next to another or accusations of not following the rules. There is potential for escalating conflict if this is not managed appropriately. In the worst case, panic could become a serious threat to safety of flight. To address this, operators should consider the increased likelihood of these elements within their procedures and training, including identification and management of unruly/disruptive passengers who do not comply with essential aviation public health and safety measures.

10. Crew member training

It is imperative that all operational personnel and any other staff members as deemed appropriate by the operator, be informed of their duties and responsibilities and trained appropriately on the prevention and management of unruly or disruptive passenger behaviour.

A number of operators engage staff from a third-party organisation to perform ground personnel tasks such as gate or check-in duties. In these instances, an operator has an obligation to ensure that these individuals receive the required initial and annual training related to unruly or disruptive passengers and that which constitutes interference with a crew member.

Another key aspect of training is to ensure that all operational personnel, such as crew members, gate and check-in staff are provided with information on each other's responsibilities during incidents of unruly or disruptive passenger behaviour. Being conversant with operator procedures and other staff member responsibilities will underscore the importance of supporting colleagues' decisions, and in evaluating possible implications of reversing a previous decision. This also ensures standardisation in the application of all procedures during an incident of unruly or disruptive behaviour or interference with a crew member.

Training should highlight to ground personnel the importance of preventing a passenger exhibiting behaviour that could interfere with the safety of the flight, from boarding the aircraft. Managing an unruly passenger on the ground does not have the same consequences as when that passenger is in flight. The resources available to crew members in the air are very limited; having to manage the problem themselves which could result in the safety of the flight being adversely affected.

While all aspects of training are vital, one of the goals of the regulations is to prevent unruly or disruptive passengers from embarkation. To achieve this, training should include prevention and diffusion of situations involving unruly or disruptive behaviour. The ultimate goal is to ensure that incidents of interference with crew members are diminished as much as possible, and that passengers and crew members are provided with a safe travelling and working environment.

11. Sample training program for crew members

Detailed below is competency-based training relating to management of unruly/disruptive passenger situations on which operators can base course programming.

Note: Performance criteria is limited to management of unruly/disruptive passenger situations only and does not take into account other security threat situations for which crew members must be trained such as hijacking or bomb threat.

Competency unit 1 – Perform duties and responsibilities related to unlawful interference

Competency element – Manage unruly passengers

Performance criteria

- monitor the cabin to identify potentially unruly passengers
- assess the threat level of the situation
- apply procedures according to the threat level
- communicate relevant information to the flight crew and other cabin crew
- apply appropriate flight deck access procedures
- use appropriate self-defence responses
- identify and manage appropriate able-bodied passenger(s)

- manage the response to the unruly passenger(s) and coordinate the situation with the flight crew and other cabin crew
- use non-lethal protective devices, if required
- maintain control of the cabin
- coordinate the situation with the flight crew and other cabin crew
- complete the applicable documentation.

Knowledge

- Operator policy and regulations regarding acts of unlawful interference
- Communication with flight crew during an act of unlawful interference and the type of information that should be transmitted (for example, threat level, number of perpetrators, any weapons, physical description(s) of perpetrator(s) and assigned seat number(s))
- Threat levels and appropriate crew responses
- Means of identifying, and procedures for managing different passenger behaviours which may interfere with the normal operation of the aircraft and/or threaten the safety and well-being of passengers and/or crew members. This may include conflict management and conflict resolution, as well as examples of unruly behaviour, such as: harassment, verbal abuse, physical assault, intimidating behaviour, intoxicated and disorderly conduct, disregard of smoking regulations, consuming own 'carry on' alcoholic beverages, refusal to follow instructions of the crew, and endangering the safety of the aircraft
- Relevant documentation to be completed, for example, reports, witness statements and notification cards to unruly passengers
- Appropriate self-defence responses
- Use of non-lethal protective devices assigned to crew members
- Use of able-bodied passengers, their roles and responsibilities in relation to cabin crew during an incident.

Reference

- Cabin Crew Operations Manual(s)/Exposition

Training media

- Classroom and/or computer-based training (including digital learning)
- Hands-on exercise on appropriate self-defence responses (for example, physical breakaway and controlling skills).

Note: Self-defence methods, if applicable, should be designed and taught by persons knowledgeable in defensive tactics, who can adapt appropriate techniques to the aircraft cabin/flight deck environment.

- Hands-on exercise on the use of non-lethal protective devices assigned to crew members
- Simulated exercise of an unruly passenger situation where cabin crew apply operator procedures and associated crew responsibilities for dealing with the situation including the use of conflict management and resolution, preferably in a representative training device or an actual aircraft, if practicable.

Performance standard

- Conduct cabin surveillance to monitor for/identify the different threat levels and carry out the corresponding responses
- Use of appropriate terminology
- Identify the factors which may contribute to unruly passenger behaviour and the means by which to diffuse the situation
- Apply cabin/flight crew communication procedures. This may include notifying the flight crew of following:

- the type and level of the threat
- the number of perpetrators
- any weapons
- assigned seat numbers
- physical description(s) of the perpetrator(s).
- Apply appropriate flight deck access procedures
- Use appropriate self-defence responses, such as physical breakaway and controlling skills
- Identify appropriate able-bodied passenger(s), give clear directions for assistance, and maintain control of those called upon to assist
- Manage the response to the unruly passenger(s) and coordinate the situation with the flight crew and other cabin crew use of non-lethal protective devices (in a safe and effective manner) to gain and maintain control of an aggressive perpetrator
- Maintain control of the cabin
- Coordinate the situation with the flight crew and other cabin crew.

Competencies

- Application of policies and procedures
- Communication
- Leadership and teamwork
- Passenger management
- Problem solving and decision making
- Situational awareness and management of information.

12. Reporting incidents of interference with a crew member

Information relating to that which is considered as unruly/disruptive behaviour has been reproduced from international guidance to distinguish between four levels of interference with a crew member. Using this type of nomenclature would be beneficial for collating data to be managed by safety departments/requisite agencies.

Level 1

An incident of a minor nature that either requires no action of the crew member beyond heightened awareness or is quickly resolved by a crew member, and which includes but is not limited to:

- the use of unacceptable language towards a crew member unacceptable language is defined as the use of swear words or profanities
- unacceptable behaviour towards a crew member using rude gestures, making unreasonable demands or trying to provoke an argument when a request has been denied, using a tone of voice to demonstrate displeasure, not following the crew members' instructions or challenging his or her authority
- a display of suspicious behaviour violating safety regulations, displaying agitation or unresponsive behaviour.

Level 2

An incident of a moderate nature that is resolved by a crew member only after some difficulty and which includes but is not limited to:

- repetition of a level one incident

- continuation of a level one incident that was unresolved
- repeated failure of a passenger to comply with a crew member's safety instructions
- belligerent, obscene or lewd behaviour towards a crew member which includes, but is not limited to, offensive or vulgar actions of a sexual nature.

Level 3

An incident where the safety of passengers or crew members is seriously threatened, which includes, but is not limited to:

- threatening a person on board or about to board the aircraft or making threats in an attempt to board the aircraft; example behaviour includes, making verbal threats of physical violence or bodily harm, being physically or verbally hostile
- continuation of a level 2 incident that was unresolved
- tampering with any emergency or safety equipment on board the aircraft
- deliberate damage to any part of the aircraft or any property on board the aircraft
- injuring a person on board the aircraft
- violent, argumentative, threatening, intimidating or disorderly behaviour, including harassment and assault.

Level 4

An incident that constitutes a security threat and which includes but is not limited to:

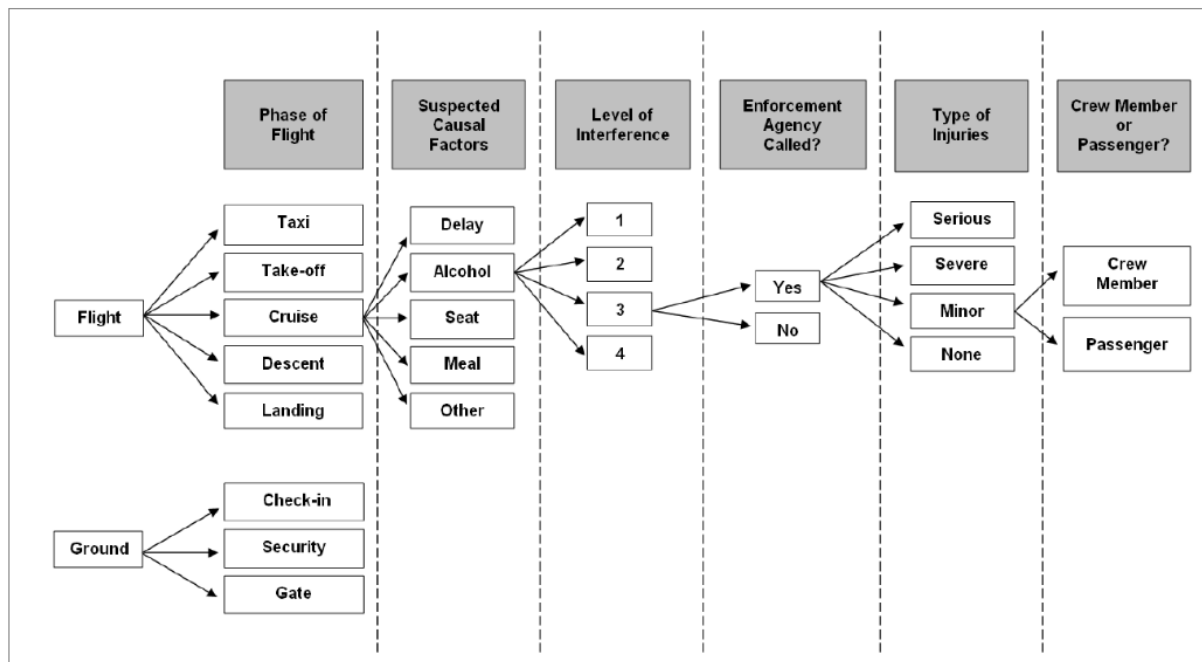
- an attempt or unauthorised intrusion into the flight deck
- a credible threat of death or serious bodily injury in an attempt to gain control over the aircraft
- display or use of a weapon
- sabotage of, or the attempt to sabotage, an aircraft that renders it incapable of flight or that is likely to endanger its safety in flight; this would include tampering with on board safety or emergency equipment and voluntarily damaging parts or aircraft property found on board
- any attempt to unlawfully seize control of the aircraft.

13. Incident report data gathering

The flow chart below provides an example of how information may be collated in order to evaluate each individual situation and produce statistics. It is not intended to be the only way in which information can be gathered, however, is a method as to how information can be grouped.

Note: To avoid repeating the same information, the chart only shows part of the complete process. For example, suspected causal factors should be indicated for each phase of flight, each level of interference indicated for each causal factor and so on, for each of the subsequent items.

Figure 1. Example – information flow collation for statistical purposes



14. Additional resources

Table 4. Additional resources

Document	Title
Australian Institute of Criminology Trends and Issues in crime and criminal justice	Responding to unruly airline passengers: The Australian Context No. 510 April 2016
Legislation	<i>Aviation Transport Security Regulations 2005</i>
Legislation	<i>Civil Aviation Act 1988</i>
Legislation	<i>Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998</i>
Manual	Civil Aviation Safety Authority Enforcement Manual December 2018
ICAO doc 10002	Cabin Safety Training Manual First Edition 2020
ICAO doc 10062	Manual on the Investigation of Cabin safety Aspects in Accidents and Incidents First Edition 2017
ICAO doc 10117	Manual on the Legal Aspects of Unruly and Disruptive Passengers First Edition 2019

15. Enquiries and more information

- View the [cabin safety](#) page.
- Contact us from Monday to Friday 8:30am to 5:00pm (AEDST), excluding national public holidays. Use +61 2 6217 1449 if overseas or contact [CASA online](#).
- Subscribe to the 'Cabin Safety Bulletins' [mailing list](#).